

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee – 7 March 2023

Subject: Update on the progress of Manchester’s Park Development Programme 2021 – 2025 and an overview of the financial position

Report of: Strategic Director Neighbourhoods & Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer

Summary

This report provides an overview of the financial (revenue and capital) position for parks and an update on the programme of investment to deliver revenue savings beyond 2021.

Recommendations

The Scrutiny Committee is recommended to consider and make comments on the content of the report.

Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

Parks by their nature contribute to the mitigation of carbon across the City and this is a key strand of the Parks Strategy. The proposals for investment in parks are being assessed against the contribution each project will make to reducing CO2.
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - the impact of the issues addressed in this report in meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty and broader equality commitments
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The enjoyment of Parks remains free at the point of access and within reach of all residents and visitors to the City. Decision making on the provision of services and opportunities for investment are driven with the commitment to ensuring that actions have a positive impact on providing an inclusive and equitable offer that is accessible to all residents and visitors. Partnerships with a focus on understanding lived experience have been key to understanding impact and best practise.
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Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	Parks are partnering in new and fruitful ways with organisations and communities to increase opportunities for personal development through volunteering, work experience, employment and training.

A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Parks offer a unique opportunity to engage in formal educational activity in the natural environment. Opportunities to build life skills such as communication and teamwork are offered through a wide range of volunteering activities.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Parks are at the heart of our communities, offering opportunities for community cohesion through volunteering, events and activities in a setting that is open and accessible to all.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	Parks are an essential part of our neighbourhoods and enhance positive outcomes for residents and businesses. The delivery of a vibrant programme of events and activities is increasing the number of visitors from outside of the City. Whilst parks naturally contribute to the low carbon city agenda, new ways of using and activating the estate in a way that can actively contribute to lowering or offsetting carbon emissions are being explored.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	Parks connect our City in many different ways, physically they are expanding to offer enhanced green corridors for people and wildlife and socially by sustaining opportunities for shared experiences and common interests.

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy, please contact one of the contact officers above.

- Take a Brief Walk Through Manchester's Park Strategy 2017 – 2026
- Manchester's Park Strategy
 - Executive Summary
 - Research and Findings
 - Ten Year Action Plan
- Report to Community and Equalities Scrutiny Committee – 14 January 2021, Manchester's Park Development Programme 2021 – 2025
- Report to Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee – 7 December 2021, Manchester's Park Development Programme 2021 – 2025

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the Parks current revenue budget position and an update on the programme of capital investment into Parks, including the Parks Development Programme (PDP) in the context of delivering the park strategy and the drive to reach a sustainable funding model for the service.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In December 2017 a ten-year strategy for Manchester's Parks was launched to guide their investment, upkeep and activation. The strategy set out the vision, key themes and actions that were needed to ensure parks and green spaces continued to serve the needs of communities across the city, providing popular and attractive open spaces for play, sport and informal recreation. There was a focus on 4 key themes:

1. **Parks at the Heart of Neighbourhoods** looks at the physical role of parks in neighbourhoods across the city, as well as their size, accessibility and character.
2. **Vibrant Parks, Vibrant Communities** considers the use and activities that take place in parks to ensure they are a focus of community life, providing opportunities for exercise and sport, and a wide variety of events that can both serve communities and generate additional income for the benefit of parks.
3. **A Manchester Quality Standard** sets out a good-quality standard for managing and maintaining parks.
4. **Productive Parks in Partnership** describes ways to deliver park services in a more collaborative and fruitful manner with communities and local organisations, not just the Council.

- 2.2 Strong progress on the delivery of the strategy continues, whilst maintaining a balanced revenue budget position which includes the generation of income to support the revenue budget and bringing forward capital investment in development programme projects that will further enhance the parks offer and generate further revenue.

- 2.3 In terms of the impact on Manchester residents and visitors this reflects a continued uplift in the use of Parks of circa 13% on pre-pandemic levels, with an estimated 4.7M visits to Parks in 21/22. Visitors are also staying on site longer with an average visit of 157 minutes, the vast majority of events and facilities continue to be free at the point of access. The growth of the Service in this last year can be attributed to the uplift in events and activity which have increased by 16% year on year, from 1,557 in 2021 to 1,812 in 2022, this is alongside the ongoing investment programme to improve infrastructure and facilities and enhance the visitor experience.

- 2.4 Partnerships with volunteers, stakeholders and national bodies continue to support and drive a significant proportion of service delivery and investment across the Parks estate. The value placed on partnership is evidenced in the development of the Parks in Partnership (PIP) Fund in 2021, with a strong

locality approach, making £30k available in each ward for projects to help raise standards and the broader Parks Development Programme (PDP) which has a clear focus on return for investment and the ambition to work jointly to provide match funding and shared outcomes.

- 2.5 The Parks net revenue budget has been reduced in recent years as part of the overall Council budget setting. As part of the 2021/22 budget process Parks approved savings were £427k, to be achieved over four years through growing income with the PDP available to support achieving these targets.

Financial Year	Annual Approved Savings £000's	Cumulative Approved Savings £000's
2021/22	£127k	£127k
2022/23	£100k	£227k
2023/24	£100k	£327k
2024/25	£100k	£427k

- 2.6 The parks current approved 2022/23 revenue budget is gross expenditure £3.876M offset by income of £1.818M to give a net budget of £2.058M, this is net of the £100k approved 2021/22 savings.

- 2.7 A further £127k of savings are proposed in 2023/24 through changes to car parking tariffs at Heaton Park and the proposal to not reinstate bonfire and firework displays. The proposals have already been considered by Scrutiny as part of the 2023/24 budget proposals and are to be taken to Executive and Council for final approval. Both proposals will be subject to further consultation with key agencies and local partners.

3.0 Capital

- 3.1 The Parks Development Programme (PDP), including the Parks in Partnership (PIP) fund continue to operate within the framework set out in a report to the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee on 14 January 2021 titled Manchester's Park Development Programme 2021 – 2025 and can be found via this link: [Governance Report \(manchester.gov.uk\)](https://www.manchester.gov.uk/governance-reports).
- 3.2 Additional investment in the capital programme for parks continues to be secured from other sources including S106 funding and match funding from strategic partners. Partnerships with organisations such as British Cycling, the Lawn Tennis Association, Transport for Greater Manchester (via Highways) and Veolia have generated additional investment to the value of £0.797M to date.
- 3.3 A total of £3.56M has been invested across the Parks estate through PDP and Section 106 and PIP funding over 150 individual community work packages identified and delivered in collaboration with residents and stakeholders. This has resulted in projects which have widened access and participation, enabled more residents and visitors to get involved and supported the delivery of good quality parks and green spaces for residents and visitors to the city.

3.4 **Projects completed in 2022/23** - 8 projects were completed in 2022/23, totalling **£3.56M**, including match funding of **£500k**. The delivery of these projects may have been spread across a number of financial years. These are:

- **Parks in Partnership (PIP), £0.50M** - 98 applications have been made to PIP resulting in over 150 community driven work packages in parks and green spaces citywide. Within this, PIP has allocated a total of 31 direct payments to constituted groups totalling £142k which have been led by the groups with support from council officers. Works include new water and electric supplies to support the sustainability of existing volunteer programmes, through to the installation of new gym/play equipment and infrastructure repairs and improvements to support accessibility.
- **Wythenshawe Hall (PDP), £211k** - Decoration of the tenant's hall, toilets and bar area to prime the use and activation of the historic setting. The Hall has now reopened to the public with an operational office which supports use of the building by the Friends group.
- **Accessible changing facilities and toilets (PDP), £485k** – Accessible changing and toilet provision located in the sports hub at Wythenshawe Park. The project will service the existing stakeholders and visitors and the increased footfall due to the new cycling provision.
- **Wythenshawe Park Cycling Hub (PDP & British Cycling), £1.55M** - A partnership project with £500k funded by British Cycling to provide new learn to ride area, cycle trails, skills areas, and a path network to provide an accessible route for all park visitors around the site.
- **Cringle Park (S106), £30k** - Installation of new outdoor gym equipment delivered in partnership with the Friends of Cringle Park in contribution to the Park Plan and promoting health and wellbeing opportunities at a local level.
- **Whitworth Park (S106), £132k** - Installation of a water and power supply to a community growing cabin in partnership with Whitworth Gallery and the Friends of Whitworth Park.
- **Greenbank Park (S106), £134k** - Renovation of two tennis courts including new access, surfacing, tennis nets and posts. The site now forms part of the citywide tennis development strategy in partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and MCRactive.
- **Debdale Park (S106), £292k** - Renovation of three tennis courts including new access, surfacing, tennis nets and posts as part of the citywide tennis development strategy.
- **Non-Turf Cricket Wickets (English Cricket Board (ECB)), £232k** – Installation of the final 2 cricket wickets at Hough End Playing Fields,

completing the programme of installation with the ECB and MCRactive of 17 wickets across the city.

- 3.5 **Development of the pipeline** - To ensure that projects are viable, contribute to the Council's key strategies, have a strong return on investment and the potential support of delivery partners willing to underwrite risk, the Parks Team have developed a series of background studies to ensure that climate resilience, travel planning, and conservation of historic and ecological features play a leading role in the development of propositions. Of particular note are the Heritage Landscape Plan for Wythenshawe Park and the Transport Plans for Heaton Park and Wythenshawe Park which have been completed in the last year.
- 3.6 A commercial master plan for Wythenshawe Park is currently under commission, on completion (expected June 2023) it will set out further investment opportunities with a focus on the existing built environment including the heritage hub, horticultural centre and sports hub. All investment opportunities will seek to dovetail with the Council's Asset Management Programme (AMP) investment and will have a clear remit to focus on any options which support progress towards the Council's Zero Carbon target to reduce carbon emissions.
- 3.7 A Parks Climate Change Action Plan has been developed ready to go live in April 2023. The plan replicates the workstreams of the corporate action plan and places an emphasis on ensuring that programmes for investment have a positive impact on climate change. Decarbonisation of park buildings, sustainable travel, climate adaptation, carbon storage and sequestration are all key considerations in the development of projects as they progress through the pipeline.
- 3.8 **Pipeline Projects** - The foundations for investment to continue at pace have been set with strategic support given to the further development of c£6.4M of investment over the next two years for the immediate, short and medium term pipeline for delivery, that is set to generate up to £4M in match funding from partners, in compliance with PDP criteria.
- 3.8.1 **Immediate - live in the next 6 months:**
- **Parks in Partnership (PIP) - £186k** is already committed and being timetabled for delivery.
 - **Platt Fields Park BMX (PIP and British Cycling)** – A Places to Ride development of c£72k in partnership with British Cycling for improvements to the existing BMX track at Platt Fields Park.
 - **Cringle Park Café (PDP)** - Installation of a café unit at Cringle Park in partnership with a community operator. The project has strategic approval to proceed and is in the final design stage with an expectation to be completed in summer 2023. The total project budget is forecast at £110k.

- **Wythenshawe Park Cycling Hub, phase 2 (PDP)** – New measures to support the control of vehicles entering the Park and ensure the safety of visitors. Improvements will also be made to interior paths that will support visitors to move easily between key onsite facilities. The latest forecast spend is £121k with match funding of £12.5k secured from British Cycling.
- **Citywide Tennis Investment Programme (PDP and Lawn Tennis Association (LTA))** – Investment in hub sites to create a sustainable parks tennis network across the city, enabling reinvestment into recreational tennis in parks. The latest forecast for spend is £444k including a commitment of £159k from the LTA.
- **Southwick Park Improvements (DCMS and MCC)** – DCMS have made £85k of Levelling Up funds available to Manchester aligned to strict criteria around improving access to green spaces and green cover. The project will improve accessibility by improving the infrastructure, reducing the hard landscape in favour of greening and a planting programme to increase biodiversity and community connection with nature.
- **City in the Community (Manchester City Football Club (MCFC))** – Installation of new football skills zones at Scotland Hall Road and Ladybarn Parks to the value of c£500k, funded by MCFC with a commitment to an ongoing programme of activation.

3.8.2 Short term – To be delivered within 6-18 months:

- **Parkway Playing Fields Play Area (PIP and Veolia)** – A partnership with the Friends which has secured grant funding of £75k matched against PIP to design and deliver a scheme of new and improved play equipment.
- **Manchester Pollinator Parks (PDP)** - This is an emerging partnership with the Eden Project to sow and harvest wildflowers seeds across Manchester Parks.
- **Mount Road, Phase 3 (S106)** – Accessibility and infrastructure improvements in Debdale Park with a value of up to £32k.
- **Highfield Country Park (S106)** - Improving access around the site and providing ecological improvements to the value of £150k. Design is emerging in partnership with stakeholders.
- **Changing Places (Changing Places Fund)** – The Council bid successfully for grant funding to introduce new fully accessible Changing Places at Heaton Park Lakeside and Wythenshawe Park Courtyard.

3.8.3 Medium-term – To be delivered within 2 years:

- **Boggart Hole Clough Hub (PDP and S106)** – To design and deliver a new multi-purpose hub which provides a community space, sports changing rooms and an operational office for local use and activation.

- **Debdale Park (PDP)** – Proposed investment into the existing barns and buildings adjacent to Debdale reservoir and growing centre. To include spaces for park operations, community activity, supporting existing stakeholder activity, options for food and beverage and new opportunities for family attractions.
- **Platt Fields Park (PDP)** – Relocation of existing staff office to back of house and repurpose Lakeside Centre to provide a visitor attraction with an associated food and beverage offer. An enhanced play offer and refurbishment of the neighbouring boathouse to return water-based activity for the lake will also be considered.
- **The Croft in Fletcher Moss Gardens (PDP)** – Overhaul of the building to build on the success of the current food and beverage offer, repurpose the area that was previously residential and expand the partnership offer with the volunteers who undertake the maintenance of the horticultural assets and the RSPB.
- **Heaton Park Orangery (PDP)** - Refit of the Orangery within Heaton Hall to kick start use for a food and beverage offer. Design and build phase funded by MCC and programmed to overlap with a concession contract tender for an operator to support the detailed design.
- **Heaton Park Family Attraction (PDP)** - A soft market test has been undertaken for a Family Attraction at Heaton Park with a healthy response from the market. Strategic support is in place for the project including a route to procure a partner to design, build, operate and maintain the asset.
- **Heaton Park Mobility Hub (TBC)** – Ongoing design to RIBA stage 2 for the creation of an outline design, cost plan and business case for a mobility hub which will protect the existing overflow car park for year round use. The hub will support active travel and include EV charging for bikes/cars, pedestrian access improvements, covered cycle storage and a Park and Stride option for the adjacent school.
- **Manchester College mitigation in Wythenshawe Park (S106)** - £524k is available to mitigate for the loss of two full size football pitches at the former college site. The project will include installation of drainage and access paths in creating the two additional pitches within the park.

4.0 Revenue

- 4.1 As at December 2022 Parks are forecasting a small underspend of £20k, this is made up of higher than forecast income of c£250k offset by covering a number of one-off costs such as essential repairs and maintenance of infrastructure across all Parks and increased security costs.
- 4.2 Looking forward to 2023/24 the table below sets out the overall proposed Parks revenue budget, this is net of both the approved savings and the

proposed £127k savings for 2023/24. The gross Parks budget is c£3.8M, of which c68% is in respect of employee budgets, equivalent to 61fte. Income generation is budgeted at just over £2M to give a net revenue budget of c£1.8M.

Parks	2023/2024 Indicative Budget £'000
Expenditure:	
Employees	2,624
Running Expenses	1,252
Sub Total Subjective Expenditure	3,876
Less:	
Other Internal sales	(41)
Gross Expenditure	3,835
Income:	
Government Grants	0
Customer and Client Receipts	(2,001)
Other Income	(2)
Gross Income	(2,003)
Total Net Budget	1,832

- 4.3 Since 2016 the income budget has increased from £0.927M to £1.818M in 2022/23, this is a 96% increase in income generated by Parks. The growth in income has not only contributed to the Councils overall savings requirements it has quickened the pace of delivering the strategic objectives, by enabling investment in parks to raise the standards at key sites and the growth of the service across the wider estate
- 4.4 The continued growth of income is the result of a strong focus for investment on workstreams that deliver to the park strategy and support a more sustainable future for the service. Investment has been focused on parks that have the most opportunity in terms of increasing visitor numbers and more effective programming of the calendar of events and infrastructure.
- 4.5 The service will continue to generate opportunities for improved revenue income, based on the track record and progress made over the last 6 years, this includes:
- Generating income from contracting arrangements, such as mobile catering and ice cream.
 - By continuing to increase visitor numbers.
 - Offering a more vibrant programme of events and activities; and,

- through the addition of new or improved attractions, such as children's play, that would increase dwell time on site and increase visitors' secondary spend.

5.0 Risk

5.1 The deliverability of the programme of investment in Parks and the continued growth in income has a number of associated risks, including:

- Priorities being agreed following local stakeholder engagement.
- Planning approval being granted, where appropriate.
- Delivery partners willing to underwrite financial risk.
- Availability in the market for specialist delivery partners.
- The stabilisation of costs as the cost of construction materials continue to rise.
- Uplift in delivery costs for partners that will impact cost of delivering services and construction.
- Cost of living and maintaining the balance of free access and activities.

5.2 The Parks team have reviewed the main challenges in the delivery of capital projects in parks over recent years and the learning has been considered in mapping out the pipeline for delivery in terms of costs and timescales.

6.0 Conclusion and Next Steps

6.1 Despite the financial challenge ahead, the alignment to the strategic themes laid out within Manchester's Park Strategy will remain. The Parks Development Programme will:

- Unlock the potential to generate additional funds, with an anticipated £427k income growth by 2024/25.
- Progress the delivery of a consistently good quality standard.
- Increase the number of visitors and enable more stakeholders to play an active role.

6.2 Delivery of the programme of investment will continue with the following key steps:

- A continued focus on engagement with stakeholders and partners to fully explore opportunities aligned to the Park Strategy.
- Progress live feasibilities for projects in the pipeline to inform business cases and checkpoint submissions.